



BOOK REVIEW

## *Telecollaboration Applications in Foreign Language Classrooms*

Reviewed by

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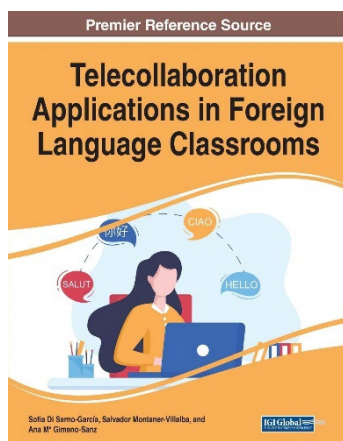
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### *Telecollaboration Applications in Foreign Language Classrooms*

Edited by Sofia Di Sarno-García, Salvador Montaner-Villalba, and Ana Mª Gimeno-Sanz

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**Telecollaboration Application in Foreign Language Classrooms** is an exciting and valuable addition to the field of scholarly work in telecollaboration and language learning. The volume includes a variety of articles detailing how the latest research in virtual exchange can impact, affect, and work alongside different types of language curricula and other technological modalities. There are recommendations, theories, and advice from leading scholars in the field who have written about how, where, and when telecollaboration can be used to innovate in language education. Telecollaboration in education is the use of computer and/or digital communication tools to promote learning through social interaction and collaboration, thus, moving the learning process beyond the physical boundaries of classrooms. Telecollaboration studies can be described as “the application of online communication tools to bring together classes of language learners in geographically distant locations to develop their foreign language skills and intercultural competence through collaborative tasks and project-based work” (O’Dowd, 2011, p. 342). Moreover, telecollaboration or virtual exchange has a long tradition in language education, but the digital spaces are constantly changing and evolving and therefore, designing effective tasks for virtual exchange can be difficult and tedious (Mouller-Hartmann & Kurek, 2016). However, telecollaboration is also growing in popularity in the field of second language teacher education for both pre- and in-service teachers. For participants in the virtual exchange field or those wanting to become involved, it is crucial to understand how to organize and engage learners using the various technology tools that are available or new ones that are constantly being released. Therefore, this volume also provides articles on how to improve and create various pedagogical processes in language education and ways to motivate or measure learners’ comfortability with telecollaboration applications in several different places and contexts across the world.

This volume discusses and provides ideas for how to use Virtual Reality (VR), Messaging Apps (MIMs), Task-Based Language Learning Theories (TBLT), Languages for Specific Purposes Principles (LSP), Cyberpragmatics, and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) paradigms to also examine how the instructor can serve as a facilitator and leader to accompany those proposed strategies and techniques to show the value of telecollaboration to foster more communication and digital agency to improve linguistic and cultural skills in foreign language classrooms.

The volume is organized into six sections, beginning with “Contextualizing Telecollaboration in Foreign Language Settings,” followed by “Developing Pragmatic Competence through Telecollaboration,” “Fostering Learner Willingness to Communicate through Telecollaboration,” “Telecollaboration for Intercultural Communication and Global Citizenship,” “Learner and Teacher Perceptions of Telecollaboration,” and concluding with “Task-Based Language Learning in Telecollaboration.” The 14 chapters cover an expansive array of diverse themes, including, but not limited to, telecollaboration and pragmatic competence, TBLT, cyberpragmatics, online task design, intercultural learning, pre-service teacher course design, language transfer, and VR-mediated exchanges, age and second language acquisition (SLA), mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) and learner autonomy, all the while promoting conversations related to how to further develop L2 listening, speaking, reading, writing, and cultural competence. Each chapter provides specific insight into an area of telecollaboration, and the content is grouped accordingly. Due to the book’s length, it is not possible to elaborate extensively on every chapter’s specific significance for this review, thus, what follows is a selection of various highlights and features from the volume.

### **Section I: Contextualizing Telecollaboration in Foreign Language Settings**

In the first two chapters of the book (Ch.1- Toscu and Ch.2 -Tsubata, Inagaki, Nozawa & Ishikawa), the authors discuss and review how telecollaboration research allows for the development of more connections and engagement from participants. The first chapter conducts a systematic review of important telecollaboration studies from the last 20 years and explains the important takeaways from various crucial study findings. The author

concludes that the studies mostly show that students who participate in telecollaboration studies improve their digital and pragmatic competence, their literacy, and that pre-service teachers could develop more self-perceptions and exchange knowledge to foster more authentic English communication in their classrooms. In the second chapter of the volume, the authors develop a pre-telecollaboration training course for Japanese EFL learners, and their main takeaway was that the English-speaking skills of all their participants improved after participating in the seminar and that the students themselves developed their own agency. They concluded that teachers play an important role in monitoring virtual exchange sessions to provide facilitation of the content and tasks with the hope that foreign language anxiety can also be reduced with more teacher engagement and that students will ultimately show more signs of a willingness to communicate through different types of telecollaboration sessions when they discuss their career plans for the future.

## **Section II: Developing Pragmatic Competence through Telecollaboration**

In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, the focus of the volume shifts to analyze how telecollaboration can assist in developing pragmatic competence. In Chapter 3, Espejel, Concheiro, and Pujolà perform a cyberpragmatic analysis of the multimodal elements of WhatsApp interactions. This multimodality emphasis is important because without a sound understanding of how multimodalities work, the use of different modes in an integrated manner to communicate meaning will affect teachers' attitudes or abilities to "decenter" from pre-existing notions of language learning and teaching (Byram, 1997). The authors focused on detailing how emojis, audio files, and different elements of messaging systems (like WhatsApp) allow for certain affordances to be explored. The authors observed that students could use these multimodal elements of chat to build a social presence in their online learning community to develop more cohesion and trust, which is crucial for collaborative learning and for the students to widen their linguistic landscape and acquire more language skills. In Chapter 4, Nuzzo and Donato examine how language partners' errors in an exchange are rated in English and Italian telecollaboration tasks to explore written corrective feedback and pragmatic appropriateness. They confirmed that it is often quite difficult to assess pragmatic competence and development in an L2 but that implementing peer feedback in tandem telecollaboration programs can foster pragmatic development when pragmatic strategies like criticizing and suggesting are utilized. Chapter 4's accurate depiction of investigating pragmatic cues through a peer feedback lens gives us more valuable feedback to focus on the importance of collaboration based on suggestions, context clues, and error awareness. Lastly, in Chapter 6, Di Sarno-García reviews a number of strategies used to apologize by Spanish-speaking students who participated in a telecollaboration project with English-speaking partners. She concluded that some participants used apology strategies that were transferred from their L1. Additionally, she stressed the importance of her data analysis pointing to how pragmalinguistic choices were transferred from the participants' L1 too, which may have an eventual impact on social norms.

## **Section III: Fostering Learning Willingness to Communicate through Telecollaboration**

In Chapter 6, Rezaeyan and Gimeno-Sanz examine the role of the instructor as a pedagogical mentor in telecollaborative exchanges and analyze data to argue for the incorporation of using more specific strategies and techniques to promote L2 learners' pragmatic competence and willingness to communicate. Understanding teachers' pedagogical strategies is crucial for effective technology-assisted language learning since given the widening and rapidly emerging scope of technologies that can be used in language education, teachers and their beliefs have become key decision-makers in the successful integration of language teaching technologies (Lomicka & Lord, 2004). The authors assigned two EFL learner groups to teacher-mentored collaborative pre-task planning and student-led collaborative pre-task planning activities. The results of the data

analysis indicate that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group in the discourse comprehension test and increased their “willingness to communicate” (WTC) at the post-intervention stage. The results show that telecollaborative exchanges can be improved if educators provide more guidance to help students engage more efficiently in intercultural interactions. In Chapter 7 (by Canto, Jauregi-Ondarra & Gruber), the focus is on High-Immersion Virtual Reality-Mediated Intercultural Virtual Exchanges with participants from Germany and the Netherlands communicating in Spanish. The authors’ findings show that while WTC in social VR contexts varied among students, they did display varying degrees of engagement, and some VR features lowered the students’ anxiety. Moreover, the authors were able to show through the context of their study and other promising results that VR is a useful technology for foreign language (FL) learning, which provides a unique atmosphere for social interaction. As VR devices and systems become more available, they also call for more research to investigate the benefits of VR for FL learning, but caution that researchers should also address any possible negative effects in their studies. They advise that further research is needed to address the role of task difficulty, interactivity, and other aspects of language learning, such as proficiency level and motivation in VR contexts.

#### **Section IV: Telecollaboration for Intercultural Communication and Global Citizenship**

For Chapter 8, Clouet examines a group of 18 learners of Spanish from various countries to focus on the development of their intercultural communicative competence skills. The participants completed questionnaires and oral presentations and the author concluded that even a short-term online language program can prove beneficial for a student to understand their own cultural habits, to show empathy, and to acquire the ability to communicate with others, thus, thereby showing certain linguistic and cultural gains. The use of telecollaboration in Clouet’s study demonstrates that technology can remove geographical limits and allow students to access meaningful content while simultaneously communicating with people of different languages and cultures to grow their communicative competence. In Chapter 9, Biondo Salomão and Viana da Silva, continue the discussion on global communicative competence by designing a virtual exchange with 92 students from Brazil and the U.S.A. through a study in conjunction with the Teletandem Brasil Project. They analyze the roles of global competence and emotional intelligence to see how participants communicate about the Amazon rainforest, forests in Alaska, and the challenges faced by indigenous populations in Brazil and in the U.S.A. The authors surmise that it is possible to identify that the feelings of sadness, worry, anxiety, and anger expressed by some participants can allow for the idea of being a global citizen to turn into a valuable one. Their detailed telecollaboration data analysis showed that both pre-tasks and the collaborative tasks can lead to demonstrating more critical thinking skills which engages students in a more intimate way where they use the target language and technology to think about their self-awareness, trust issues, and conscientiousness.

#### **Section V: Learner and Teacher Perceptions of Telecollaboration**

In Chapters 10-12, the focus turns to students’ responses and teachers’ perceptions during telecollaboration tasks focusing on reflective journal use. Reflective journals are a vital part of many telecollaboration and foreign language studies since they allow students and tandem partners the chance to more critically think about their interactions and the types of feedback they are both giving and receiving. In Chapter 10, Roxana Bellot reviews Spanish students’ responses to the implementation of a virtual exchange project in EFL literature. She uses telecollaboration as a mode to enhance cross-cultural understanding and awareness to build skills with English-language literary analysis to foster the use of English for academic purposes. Roxana Bellot explores students’ opinion polls to observe their pre-conceptions and final feedback from the overall experience. She devised a 7-week learning unit designed to promote students’ cultural awareness and intercultural competence skills as they developed their literary analysis, digital

competence, and EFL language capabilities. Thus, her university students were exposed to a variety of authentic texts in English with the aim of enabling them to foster their cultural sensitivity by introducing topics related to mental illness (post-partum depression), motherhood, gender expression, teenage suicide, and sex work. The overall positive feedback received from the students supports the benefits that telecollaboration approaches in EFL encourage and she calls for exploring new venues for developing similar practices in higher education. In Chapters 11 (Ramila Diaz & Vinagre) and 12 (Vinanda), the focus is on how to better foster participants' competence development in virtual exchanges through instrumental, interpersonal, and systemic competences. The authors' results show that the value of teamwork was the most developed transversal competence, which also allowed the students to think about their ability to plan and manage time, identify and resolve problems, make reasoned decisions, commit to tasks and responsibilities, and reflect about their changing attitudes toward intercultural telecollaboration programs.

### **Section VI: Task-Based Language Teaching in Telecollaboration**

In Chapter 13, Pomposo and Martínez-Sáez analyze the implementation of telecollaborative activities in a Spanish course for undergraduates. Apart from improving their students' linguistic and digital skills, the authors created tasks to assist students in developing their civic and entrepreneurial competences. The participants were tasked with using their knowledge and expertise to design a fictitious start-up which would help humanity live more sustainably. In this study, 49 students worked in groups to design a virtual poster presentation. The authors concluded that through telecollaboration, it is possible to achieve useful and social objectives such as improving competences, designing a company, and reaching indisputable agreements in an L2. The task design and virtual exchange of the study allowed for many instances of negotiating meaning, exchanging relevant information, and examining products through various tasks and joint discussions.

For Chapter 14, Loizidou and Savlovska propose online task design in a rather innovative way for telecollaboration purposes. This study examines an asymmetrical telecollaboration project between tutors (future French language teachers) and learners (French language students) where the tutors design pedagogical scenarios and help the learners to accomplish them. The analysis looks at online task design to provide a better understanding of interaction between tutors and learners and how learner flexibility is related to understanding the student-tutor interactions. The study also reviewed the role of the tutor as a teacher, who corrects the learners and the various interactions that were had through telecollaboration to conclude that the role of the peer is challenging for students and that better task design fosters more peer-to-peer interactions between learners and tutors.

Overall, this volume is a comprehensive and detailed review of the state of the telecollaboration field, including how telecollaboration technologies and pedagogical practices have advanced. The book appropriately and effectively highlights gaps in the literature and research and shows that there are many opportunities for more research to be conducted. New and innovative contributions to the field are vital as there is a continued need to analyze how telecollaboration affects student and teacher perceptions, anxiety levels, intercultural competence learning, practicing the ability to negotiate meaning with others, and the awareness to understand the world from the perspectives of others. Even though 25 years have elapsed, the words from Byram & Zarate (1997) still hold true in that the use of telecollaboration will continue to be important to be able to interpret other realities, understand the points of view of others, question one's own points of view, and analyze and adapt one's behavior as well as one's underlying values and beliefs.

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